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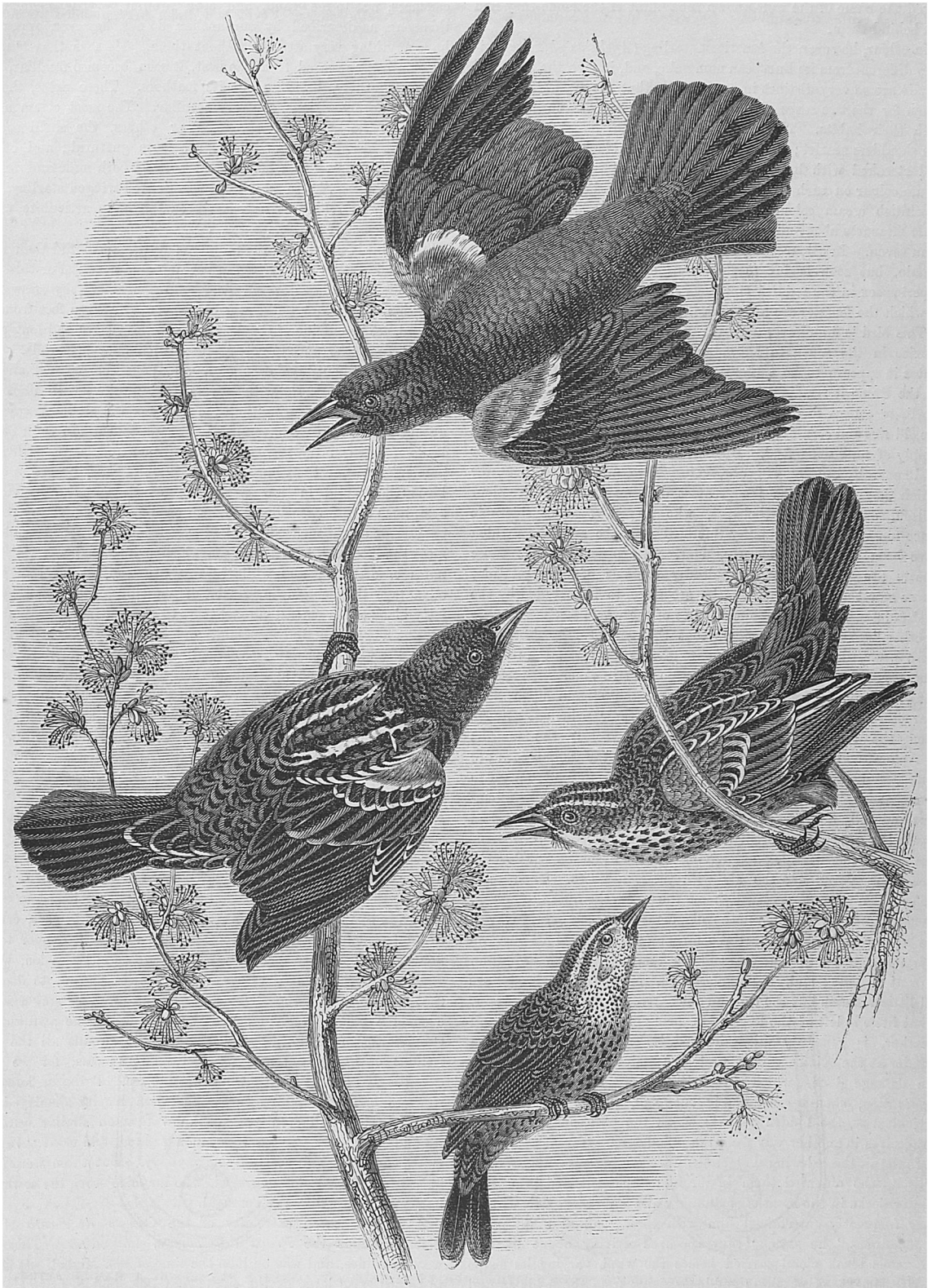
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## THE AMERICAN RED-WINGED STARLING.

THE AMERICAN RED-WINGED STARLING (*AGELAIUS PHOENICEUS*).

THE appearance of the common European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) is familiar to all Europeans. In captivity his docility and liveliness render him a very common favourite, whilst his bad character as a depredator gives him considerable interest in

the eyes of dwellers in the country, although it not unfrequently leads to his destruction. Our forefathers, following their usual practice of giving the Old World names to the most familiar natural objects in their adopted homes, soon found a bird

which resembled the starling of the old country in its habits, and to a certain extent also in its form, and to this they easily transferred the name of the well-known inhabitant of the home they had left behind them.

In colour, however, the American starling (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) is very different from its European namesake, and, in fact, the male and female are so very distinct in appearance, that they would never be taken for the two sexes of the same bird by any one unacquainted with their habits. The male is of a beautiful glossy black, with the shoulders scarlet; the female is brownish black above, mottled and streaked with brown or white; the head has two stripes of cream colour on each side over the eye; and the lower surface is of a whitish cream colour, streaked and spotted with black. The male measures about nine inches in length, the female a little more than seven. In colour the young male bird greatly resembles the female, but soon begins to show indications of belonging to the superior sex in the reddish markings of his shoulders, a distinction of which the females are always destitute.

This bird is found over a great range of country; extending from Mexico in the south to Labrador in the north; in the northern states it appears to be a migratory bird, but in the southern parts of the Union it remains all the year round. In these states the starlings collect during the winter in immense flocks, frequenting the old rice and corn-fields, where they contrive to glean an abundant supply of nutritious food. During the spring and summer their food generally consists of grubs, caterpillars, and other insects, for which they search with the greatest diligence in every direction. Wilson, our great ornithologist, who has devoted considerable space to an attempt to justify this bird from the aspersions which have been cast upon his character, well observes, that these insects are "the silent, but deadly enemies of all vegetation, whose secret and insidious attacks are more to be dreaded by the husbandman than the combined forces of the whole feathered tribes together." Hence he considers that the starlings, by destroying these pests, do far more service to the agriculturist than would compensate for any damage they may do him in other respects, for unfortunately, it cannot be denied that the stigma upon their character is but too well founded. For their principal attacks upon the farmer's property the starlings select the months of August and September, when the ears of the Indian corn are young, soft, and succulent, and present a temptation too great to be resisted. "At this time," says Wilson, "reinforced by numerous and daily flocks from all parts of the interior, they pour down on the low countries in prodigious multitudes. Here they are seen, like vast clouds, wheeling and driving over the meadows and devoted corn-fields, darkening the air with their numbers. Then commences the work of destruction on the corn, the husks of which, though composed of numerous envelopments of closely-wrapped leaves, are soon completely or partially torn off; while from all quarters myriads continue to pour down like a tempest, blackening half an acre at a time; and, if not disturbed, repeat their depredations till little remains but the cob and the shrivelled skins of the grain. What little is left of the tender ear, being exposed to the rains and weather, is generally much injured." Truly, we cannot much wonder at the existence of a prejudice against these birds; for that the damage done, which forces itself very strongly upon the observation, should considerably outweigh, in the minds of the agriculturist, the hidden benefits which the philosopher tells him he receives in another way from the plunderers.

In the air the red-winged starlings present a beautiful appearance. Wilson, who observed them in Virginia when collected into their winter flocks in the months of January and February, tells us that they frequently entertained him with their "aerial evolutions." "Sometimes," he says, "they appeared driving about like an enormous black cloud carried before the wind, varying its shape every moment. Sometimes suddenly rising from the fields around me with a noise like thunder; while the glittering of innumerable wings of the brightest vermilion amid the black cloud they formed, produced on these occasions a very striking and splendid effect. Then descending like a torrent, and covering the branches of some detached grove, or clump of trees, the whole congregated multitude commenced one general concert or chorus, that I have plainly distinguished at the distance of more than two miles; and, when

listened to at the intermediate space of about a quarter of a mile, with a slight breeze of wind to swell and soften the flow of its cadences, was to me grand, and even sublime." The elements of this song, as described by our author, do not, however, appear to have anything very attractive about them. He says that "when taken alive, or reared from the nest, it soon becomes familiar, and sings frequently, bristling out its feathers. These notes, though not remarkably various, are very peculiar. The most common one resembles the syllables *conk-quer-ree*; others, the shrill sounds produced by filing a saw; some are more guttural; and others remarkably clear. The most usual note of both male and female is a single *chuck*." In some instances the red-winged starling, like his European representative, has been taught to articulate words pretty distinctly.

These birds pair about the middle of April, and build their nests at the end of that month or the beginning of May. For this purpose they generally select a tuft of bushes in a marshy or swampy situation, where they build at a height of six or seven feet from the ground. The outside of the nest is formed of rushes and long grass picked from the swamp; it is lined with finer materials. The female lays about five eggs of a very pale blue colour, slightly tinged here and there with purple, and marked with lines and spots of black. "During the time the female is sitting," says the author from whom we have already quoted, and whose work on the birds of this country leaves nothing to be desired, "and still more particularly after the young are hatched, the male, like most other birds that build in low situations, exhibits the most violent symptoms of apprehension and alarm on the approach of any person to its near neighbourhood. Like the lapwing of Europe, he flies to meet the intruder, hovers at a short height over-head, uttering loud notes of distress; and while in this situation, displays to great advantage the rich glowing scarlet of his wings, heightened by the jetty black of his general plumage. As the danger increases, his cries become more shrill and incessant, and his motions rapid and restless; the whole meadow is alarmed, and a collected crowd of his fellows hover around, and mingle their notes of alarm and agitation with his. When the young are taken away, or destroyed, he continues for several days near the place, restless and dejected, and generally recommences building soon after in the same meadow."

### A BULL-FIGHT IN LISBON.

Few popular sports are more popular in the Spanish peninsula than the bull-fight. To witness a bull-fight, all classes of people, from queen to beggar-girl, and from prince to peasant, will neglect their proper business, and crowd delighted into the amphitheatre. But, alas for the chivalry of Portugal! the bull-fight no longer exists as it does in Spain—pity the sport exists at all! To be sure, cruelty to the beasts has by no means ceased, but nearly all danger to the fighters has! Soberly disappointed were we on one occasion, when, seated as spectators at the feats of the arena in Lisbon, to discover that there was not the slightest possibility of witnessing a death, even of a bull! We had nerved ourselves for some awful catastrophe, as we thought, by endeavouring to subdue all the finer feelings of humanity; but we doubt our success, for we were exceedingly disgusted with what we did see. Perhaps, however, if there had been more courage and less cruelty displayed, we might have felt differently. We know that on similar occasions we had previously become very much excited, and cried "*Viva*," for a victorious bull as loudly as anybody. But those were fights in which Spaniards were engaged, who laugh to scorn the cowardly, barbarous bull-fighters of Portugal.

At the southern extremity of the *Campo de Santa Anna*, Lisbon, stands the *Praca dos Touros*, bull-circus. This is a wooden edifice, and was built in the time of Don Miguel. It is said to be nearly as large as the circus at Cadiz, and is fitted up with some five hundred boxes, capable of containing eight or ten thousand spectators. It is destitute of neatness and elegance, and was, when we saw it, in a bad state of preservation. Along the highest rows of benches it is inappropriately ornamented with a series of trophies, vases, and obelisks, all made of wood. Every Sunday and fête-day, the proprietors give the public a performance, which is duly announced in some such fustian as follows:—